

Speaker Registration/Testimony

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 Meeting Date 05-10-2017
 Council/PH Committee Council
 Agenda Item Bill 23
 Your position on the matter Support
 Representing Self
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As a student at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa in the College of Social Sciences, born and raised in Honolulu and Kaneohe, I am learning and seeing first hand how citizens of Honolulu are bearing witness to imminent changes in the urban environment. I believe Bill 23 is crucial to protecting free and open spaces in Honolulu, enhancing the health of the region through a connected network of natural, cultural and scenic resources.

By 2020, Kaka'ako alone will house thousands of new units, high rises and new buildings, a flagship Whole Foods, a CVS, plenty locally owned small businesses, and other contemporary luxuries such as the world class Honolulu Biennial or fantastic new sand volleyball courts in Ala Moana.

With good reason for investment, billions of dollars are at stake in this neighborhood. Contracting to sell approximately \$341 million in homes at Ward Village in 2016, the total sales to date for Howard Hughes alone comes out to a cool \$1.4 billion since launching pre-sales in early 2014 — not to mention the other developers. Property one square mile around the Blaisdell Center, a population of around 18,000 and 6.1% of Oahu's total jobs, is estimated worth of \$5.6 billion (Blaisdell Master Plan June 2015). How much of this value is going into public parks in the area? Transferring public parks to profit-driven Enterprise Services changes the future of a city. It is already getting increasingly expensive to live, work and play in Kaka'ako. Who knows, one day we may be required to pay a fee simply to watch the sunset, but by then there will probably be auto-payment option directly linked to the hi-tech GPS system in my neo-cortex.

It's difficult for me to visualize the dramatic contrast between this moment and what my children could face, but we are confronted together by the question of the future of public places in Honolulu. Specifically parks, what I consider intergenerational places for peace and resiliency in the urban topography of the city.

In three to five years, Honolulu's city lights will be considerably brighter due to

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increased density, and they will still mostly burn petroleum and coal. In fifteen to thirty years, Dr. Chip Fletcher and his team at UH Mānoa indicate sea level will rise one to two feet, which puts the inundation zone for hurricanes, floods and tsunamis to about South King Street, or around Thomas Square. The water table will even rise above ground in some areas.

The future beach park I mentioned, Thomas Square, is in fact the first public park in Honolulu, as King Kamehameha's Privy Council voted in 1850. A hundred fifty years later (despite no treaty of annexation) the Hawaii Revised Statutes included a law that says Thomas Square shall be maintained as a public park. This year, the City Council discussed whether Thomas Square and the Blaisdell should become an entertainment corridor with vendors to insure a profit that makes the place self-sustaining. Supporters of this redevelopment cite the historic park is "run down" and ill-kept by the Department of Parks and Recreation and should be included alongside the zoo, the Shell, the Blaisdell and golf courses in the Department of Enterprise Services. At the rate of current global resource consumption and development, on the two hundredth birthday of Honolulu's first public park (2050) Thomas Square may look more like an urban climate refugee islet in the reclaimed wetlands of Honolulu's golf courses.

In an article by Natanya Friedheim in Civil Beat, the City Council made difficult budget cuts recently. She said the Budget Committee shaved \$134,694 from the request from the Caldwell administration for \$404,388 to fund seven positions in the Office of Climate Change, Resilience and Sustainability which voters created through a 2016 charter amendment.

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Though these cuts are troubling, in 2014 the Hawaii Climate Adaptation Initiative Act was signed into law, Hawaii Revised Statutes § 225P-3, to create the Interagency Climate Adaptation Committee, attached administratively to the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) and co-chaired by the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) and the Director of the Office of Planning (OP).

By December 31 of this year, ICAC will complete its task mandated in Act 83 (codified in HRS § 225P-3(b)(1)), to develop and deliver publicly the Sea Level Rise Vulnerability and Adaptation Report.

This report will cover Honolulu, and all the parks. How do the people instigating the redevelopment of Thomas Square discuss resiliency challenges such as resource use, the impacts of sea level rise and the record extreme heat days we continue to have? If the city is requesting a budget for the Office of Climate Change, Resilience, and Sustainability, why is this not centrally positioned as the preeminent issue for our city's public infrastructure and open spaces?

The future of public parks is important to consider as they are sources of life, resiliency, multi-generational value. Public parks are places that facilitate adaptation—they help us get through the changes we all have to face.

Why propose an administrative change from Department of Parks and Recreation to Enterprise Services at all? If Thomas Square is evidence for how this could work for our best interest, then why do many people in the community voice surprise and outrage at

the upcoming redevelopment plans of Thomas Square? Guy Kalakakui stated in his Civil Beat article that there were over 30 community and stakeholder meetings, yet I could only find a report one public outreach event on behalf of the Caldwell administration — a single workshop attended by “over 165 members of the public.” Empowered by this apparent support, Kalakakui demands compliance to a certain vision of the future and I for one am not convinced these demands should be met.

How can our community, including both the Department of Parks and Recreation and Department of Enterprise Services, navigate an uncertain future? I have seen no compelling vision so far for why any park should be transferred to Enterprise Services.

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